



1. Introduction

1.1 Brazil is one of the largest exporters of meat and meat products (hereinafter collectively known as "meat products") in the world, shipping to over 150 countries and supplying about 20% of the world's beef, pork and poultry.¹ Hong Kong is one of the biggest markets for Brazilian meat products.

1.2 On 17 March 2017, the Federal Police of Brazil unveiled an investigation on irregular practices of a group of public officials suspected of issuing health certificates for tainted meat products in exchange for bribes paid by some meat plant operators. The investigation led the Brazilian government to suspend the export licences of 21 meat plants which were involved in the investigation and remove 33 public officials from office. The incident has aroused global concern about the quality of the meat products exported from Brazil.

1.3 In the immediate aftermath of the above incident, Hong Kong's Centre for Food Safety ("CFS") announced a series of follow-up actions to ensure the safety of imported meat products from Brazil. These follow-up actions included: (a) stepping up surveillance of meat and poultry meat imported from Brazil for testing of meat deterioration and other food safety indicators; (b) imposing a temporary ban on the import of all frozen and chilled meat and poultry meat from Brazil from the evening of 21 March as a precaution, and announcing in the evening of 28 March 2017 that the scope of the import ban would be restricted to the 21 plants under investigation; and (c) ordering a recall of all frozen and chilled meat and poultry meat imported from the 21 meat plants concerned on 24 March 2017.²

¹ See Secretariat for Social Communication – International Area (2017).

² On 11 May 2017, CFS released all the recalled products following the Brazilian authorities' confirmation that the health certificates of the frozen and chilled meat and poultry meat exported to Hong Kong before the ban did not involve any irregularities, and the satisfactory inspection and surveillance testing results of the products.

1.4 In September 2017, CFS discovered several suspected falsified health certificates for imported frozen meat when it investigated a complaint lodged by a food importer in May 2017. The complaint was about a suspicious health certificate accompanying a consignment of frozen chicken feet imported earlier from Brazil, and the Brazilian authorities later confirmed that the health certificate concerned was falsified. Subsequent to the investigation, CFS has (a) suspended the import of meat products from the Brazilian exporter and the two Brazilian meat plants involved; (b) stepped up verification checks of all health certificates issued for frozen meat and poultry meat exported from Brazil to Hong Kong; and (c) discussed with the Brazilian authorities on more stringent import control of Brazilian meat products such as restricting the list and number of Brazilian meat plants authorized to export products to Hong Kong.

1.5 At the request of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene, the Research Office has prepared this fact sheet to provide an overview of the meat products imported from Brazil to Hong Kong with respect to (a) the value, volume and composition of these products; (b) the existing quality assurance mechanism; and (c) the remedial measures taken by the Brazilian government in the wake of the Brazilian meat incident.

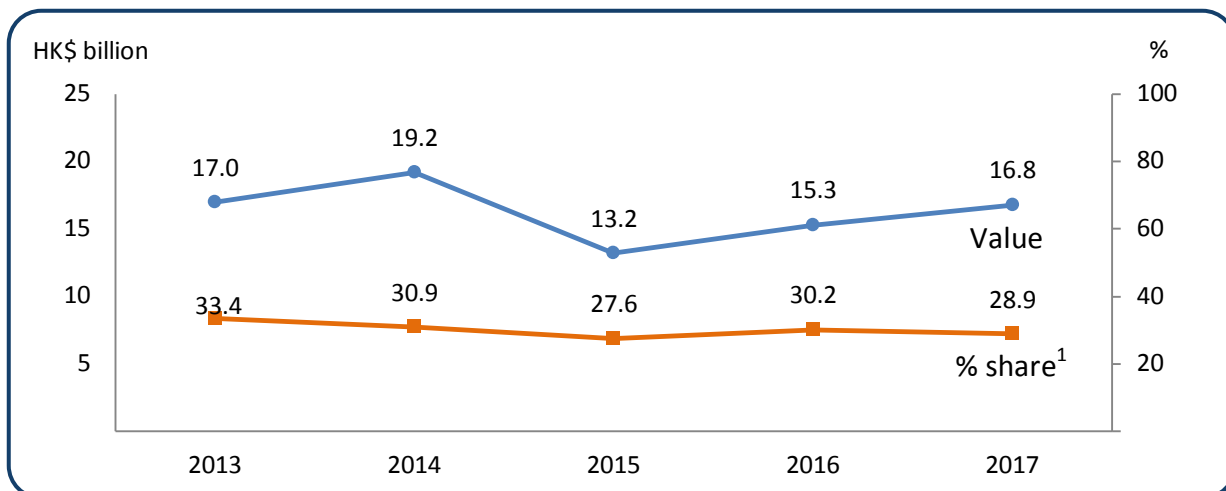
2. Imports of meat products from Brazil

2.1 Brazil has been one of the largest sources of imported food in Hong Kong, ranked the third largest in value terms after China and the United States in 2017. In 2017, Brazil shipped HK\$17.4 billion of food to Hong Kong and 96% of which were meat products.

2.2 Brazil is a major supplier of imported meat products in Hong Kong, supplying about 30% of Hong Kong's total imports of meat products in both value and volume terms in 2017 (**Figures 1 and 2**). Analyzed by product type, meat of swine, poultry and other animals, and edible offal (frozen, chilled or fresh) accounted for a significant share of the total volume of imports and retained imports³ of meat products from Brazil, at 71.8% and 55.7% respectively in 2017 (**Table 1**).

³ Retained imports of goods refer to those imported goods which are retained for use in Hong Kong rather than being re-exported to other places. The volume of retained imports of goods is derived by subtracting the volume of re-exports of goods from the volume of imports of goods.

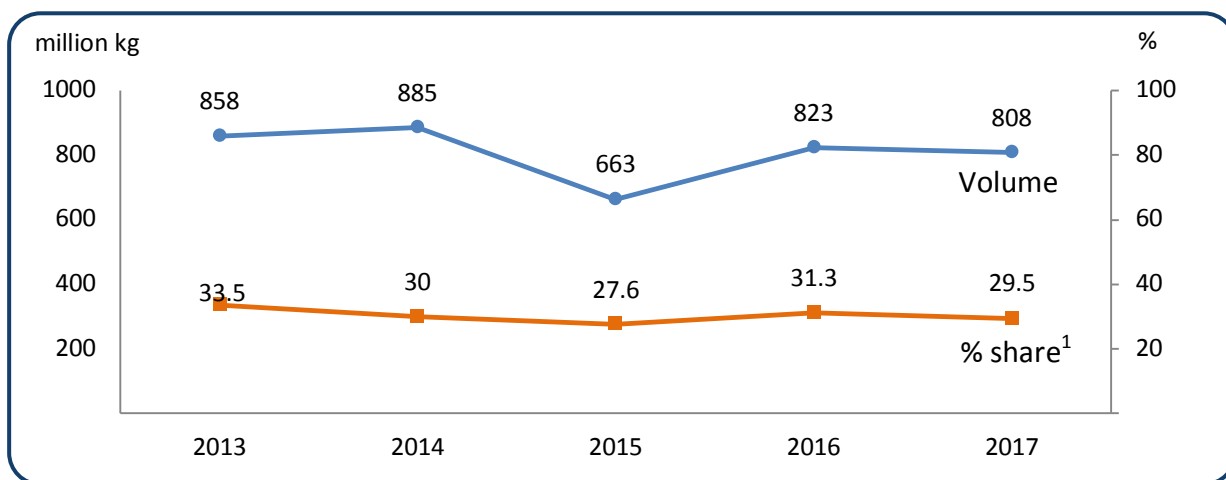
Figure 1 – Value of meat products imported from Brazil, 2013 – 2017



Note: (1) Percentage share of Hong Kong's total imports of meat products.

Source: Census and Statistics Department.

Figure 2 – Volume of meat products imported from Brazil, 2013 – 2017



Note: (1) Percentage share of Hong Kong's total imports of meat products.

Source: Census and Statistics Department.

Table 1 – Imports and retained imports of Brazilian meat products by product types, 2017

Types of meat and meat products	Imports		Retained imports	
	Volume (million kg)	Percentage of total imports	Volume (million kg)	Percentage of total retained imports
Meat of swine, poultry and other animals, and edible offal (frozen, chilled or fresh)	579.6	71.8%	265.7	55.7%
Meat of bovine animals (frozen, chilled or fresh)	213.3	26.4%	198.6	41.7%
Meat and edible meat offal (prepared or preserved)	14.6	1.8%	12.4	2.6%
Total	807.5	100	476.7	100

Source: Census and Statistics Department.

3. Quality assurance mechanism for Brazilian meat products

3.1 In Brazil, the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food Supply ("MAPA") is tasked with formulating and executing policies for promoting the sustainable development of the agribusiness for meeting the demand of the domestic and international markets. The Ministry is also entrusted with regulating the production, inspection and marketing of products of animal and plant origin. MAPA comprises, among others, five secretariats, 27 state superintendencies and their respective units, and a network of six national agricultural laboratories. MAPA has about 11 000 employees, of them 2 300 are responsible for inspection works.

3.2 The Department of Inspection of Products of Animal Origin ("DIPOA") under the Secretariat of Agricultural Protection of MAPA has implemented a series of quality control measures and programmes to ensure the quality of

products of animal origin for both the domestic and international markets. These measures and programmes include imposing registration, inspection and certification requirements on the production facilities and products, and implementing food safety control programmes to control pathogens, residues and contaminants in products.

Registration, inspection and certification of facilities and products

3.3 In Brazil, all business establishments exporting products of animal origin are required to register with and be approved by DIPOA. Approval to export products of animal origin is granted to a business establishment if it can (a) meet the specified sanitary, technical and legal requirements imposed on its facilities and operations; and (b) pass an inspection conducted by DIPOA. At present, about 4 840 business establishments are approved to export products of animal origin from Brazil. The operations and facilities of these business establishments are under the supervision and surveillance of DIPOA to ensure the quality and safety of their products.

3.4 The Federal Inspection Service under DIPOA is responsible for conducting on-site inspection and surveillance of the operations and products of the approved business establishments to ensure the quality of their products. The on-site surveillance activities include: (a) conducting ante- and post-mortem inspections of animals for slaughter; (b) verifying the self-control programmes⁴ implemented by the business establishments; (c) assessing the sanitary and operating conditions of the business establishments; (d) collecting product samples for laboratory analysis; and (e) conducting health certification for the products. The Federal Inspection Service is supported by a network of six national agricultural laboratories⁵ and 414 other laboratories accredited by MAPA for conducting chemical, microbiological and other analyses of the products.

3.5 Business establishments are all required to register their products of animal origin with DIPOA before they can sell their products in the domestic or international markets. Business establishments have to provide DIPOA with information such as the raw materials, production processes, and quality and

⁴ Business establishments are required to implement self-control programmes such as the Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures and the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point for ensuring the safety, quality and integrity of their products.

⁵ The national agricultural laboratories are also responsible for laboratory audits, research and development of analytical methods, and review of related legislation and technical guidelines.

safety control mechanisms and programmes adopted for registration. In addition, business establishments exporting their products are required to obtain the international health certificate issued by the Federal Inspection Service to indicate that the products have been inspected and meet the specified sanitary requirements.

Food safety control programmes

3.6 MAPA has implemented a number of food safety control programmes to monitor and control pathogens, residues and contaminants in products of animal origin. These programmes include:

- (a) the National Pathogen Control Programme – allowing identification of pathogens in products of animal origin which in turn helps DIPOA establish more accurate risk control measures;
- (b) the Physical/Chemical/Microbiological Standards Compliance Programme for Edible Animal Products – providing for the collection of data to verify the compliance of products to applicable content standards, evaluate the product and process controls implemented by the business establishments, and support DIPOA's risk management policies; and
- (c) the National Plan for Control of Residues and Contaminants – detecting and controlling the presence of residues of veterinary medicine and pesticides, and contaminants in food.

4. Government's remedial measures after the Brazilian meat incident

4.1 The outbreak of the Brazilian meat incident in March 2017 has aroused global concern about the quality of meat products exported from Brazil. In response, the Brazilian government has taken a series of remedial measures which include: (a) assigning special audit teams to conduct audit and inspection of the 21 meat plants involved in the incident; (b) ordering the closure of three of the 21 meat plants involved in the incident; (c) enhancing sampling of products involved in the incident for laboratory testing; and (d) strengthening the cooperation between MAPA and the Federal Police to investigate any deviations in the food quality surveillance system.

4.2 In December 2017, the Brazilian government has launched the Agro+ Integrity Programme with a view to encouraging adoption of transparent and ethical business practices in the agribusiness sector. Under the programme, agribusiness companies that act according to the rules can earn the "Agro+ Integrity Seal". A committee comprising members from the government, the business sector and the civic society will review the business practices of businesses participating in the programme. The committee will grant the "Agro+ Integrity Seal" to a business if it complies with the specified rules on areas such as preventing fraud and corruption and fulfilling social and environmental responsibilities.

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